

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Use of an artificial nest box by Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* – In March 2007 an artificial nest box was placed in a mature Lemon-scented Gum *Eucalyptus citriodora* at a height of approximately 8 metres, at a private property in Parkerville east of Perth. The box was 0.4 m deep with an entrance hollow measuring 100 millimetres.

During April a pair of Galahs took up residence and were observed for several months entering the nest box, chewing the edges of the entrance hollow, and occasionally carrying fresh eucalypt sprigs into the box. They usually defended the nest site from other birds including other Galahs, Ringneck Parrots *Barnardius zonarius* and Kookaburras *Dacelo novaeguineae*, by flying at them, but occasionally other birds landed and entered the box without raising the Galahs' attention.

In late August the Galahs' nest-lining activity increased, and by early September four eggs were laid on a bed of eucalypt leaves in one corner of the nest box, with incubation beginning after laying of the first egg. Several days later only three eggs were observed in the nest box. By late September, incubation appeared to be well underway. The female Galah did most of the incubating, during which time the male perched in the nest tree above the nest or in a tree adjacent to the nest tree. Defence

of the nest area was heightened at this time and the male screeched and flew aggressively at any birds that landed within a 10 m radius of the nest box. Screeching continued after the intruding bird had left the area which sometimes caused the female to emerge from the nest box.

An inspection in early October revealed the three eggs to be gone, however both Galahs remained in the vicinity of the nest box each day and continued lining the inside with fresh leaves. A second clutch of three eggs was laid in late October and again incubation commenced, with parental behaviour similar to those described above noted.

On 18 November both adult Galahs showed increased activity, entering and exiting the nest box repeatedly throughout the morning. An inspection revealed two of the three eggs had hatched, and both hatchlings were blind, helpless and covered in pale pink natal down. By 21 November the third chick had hatched, and was substantially smaller than its two siblings. The female brooded the chicks for much of the first four days, with the male returning to the nest box several times each day to apparently feed the young. Interestingly the adults placed the egg shells at one corner of the nest but did not remove them from the nest box.

On 6 December the Galahs were still observed in the nest tree, but their activity near the nest had decreased and it was found that two chicks were dead in the nest box. Both chicks were removed: the largest chick was about 200 mm long, had its eyes open, and well developed feather pins on its wings and back; it appeared to have died on 4 or 5 December. The second chick was half the size of the first, had some feather pins on its wings, and was in a state of decomposition that indicated its death occurred at the end of November. The third chick was absent and it probably died in the very early stages of its nest life.

On 9 December both adult Galahs continued to be observed at the nest box and roosted in the nest tree that evening. On 10 December one adult carried a fresh eucalypt sprig into the box. It is interesting that despite successive nesting failures, the Galahs remained at their chosen nest site. This pair was possibly newly established and limited breeding experience caused their unsuccessful nesting attempts. Further observations will reveal if they remain loyal to this nest site and whether they are able to breed in it successfully.

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